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## **Chat dust contaminating Picher homes, study says**

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PICHER, Okla. - What has long been suspected about the dust in the mountainous chat piles in the Tar Creek Superfund site appears to have been confirmed: The dust is contaminating homes in Picher with unsafe levels of lead.

Researchers from the University of Oklahoma placed Plexiglas plates in and around 45 homes in the former lead and zinc mining area in Ottawa County. The plates were left in place for eight hours and then wiped. Lead accumulation was measured with each wiping.

Accumulations reached unsafe levels in 28 homes within 800 days. Some showed unsafe levels in as few as 11 days, according to the study prepared for the Tribal Effort Against Lead group. On average, dust contaminated the homes in 263 days.

"In our analysis, the biggest risk to exposure for children in homes was dust," said Robert Lynch, who helped with the study. "It was outside, and it was getting carried in."

Susan Waldron, with the lead program at the Ottawa County Health Department, said the report is a confirmation of what has been believed for some time.

"This does not surprise me," she said. "We have had health professionals in this area who have told us for some time that the key to lead-poisoning prevention is dust control.

"That is true all across the nation because of lead-based paint. It is especially true here where you have lead-based paint and lead in the soil."

The county agency is giving vacuum cleaners with filters to local families with children who have elevated blood-lead levels, Waldron said.

"It helps them get the dust under control in their homes," she said. "Although people are getting tired of research studies here, this study has documented what is happening here. It may be the key to what we need.

"We cannot leave this undone. We have to deal with the chat and the dust issues."

A home is considered contaminated when it reaches 40 micrograms of lead per square foot, according to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development standards used in the study. Researchers also sampled lead levels in soil around the 45 homes. Processing of that data should be completed by midyear.

Tons of lead-laced chat were left in piles in the area, which was mined for more than 80 years. Production ended in 1970.

Lead in the environment is blamed for children in the area having high blood-lead levels, which can stunt intellectual development and produce health problems.

The federal government, through the Environmental Protection Agency, has spent more than \$100 million trying to clean up lead contamination in the area since declaring it a Superfund site in 1983.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.